



THE NATIONAL TRAILS SYSTEM



Partnership for the National Trails System

(www.stli.com/partners)

40 Years of Connecting People to America's Diverse History,
Cultures, Landscapes, and to One Another.

- America's National Trails System is one of the great conservation acts of Congress from the 1960s era that also included:
 - Wilderness Act
 - Wild & Scenic Rivers Act
 - National Environmental Policy Act
 - National Historic Preservation Act
 - Outdoor Recreation Act
 - Land & Water Conservation Fund Act
- Today the National Trails System totals over 60,000 miles in all 50 states (longer than the Interstate Highway System) and is comprised of:
 - 8 national scenic trails – established by Congress
 - 17 national historic trails – established by Congress
 - The scenic and historic trails span more than 48,350 miles through 47 states
- Traveling a National Trail brings you into direct contact with adventure, history, heritage, community, and nature. National Trails provide countless opportunities for healthful recreation in the fight against obesity. The National Trails System embodies many strands of America's natural, historic, and cultural heritage. On Scenic, Historic, and Recreation Trails you experience the great diversity of landscapes and ecosystems that comprise this great American land. Historic trails enable you to experience the rich tapestry of cultures and peoples that comprise our Nation and the many stories of pioneer travel, exploration, and struggles for civil and religious freedom that shaped our history (Native American, Hawaiian, Inuit, Hispanic, Anglo, African-American, and Asian).

- Congressionally designated National Scenic and Historic Trails are complex partnerships.
 - Various Federal agencies - primarily the U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and US Army Corps of Engineers -- play key roles in administering and managing these trails, while the Federal Highway Administration has been an important source of funding for them.
 - States are essential partners - especially where passage of the Trail is enhanced by state lands.
 - However, the bulk of the work of developing and maintaining these trails is done by volunteers coordinated by dozens of dedicated nonprofit trail organizations.

- A hallmark of the National Trails System is people-based stewardship of significant national natural and cultural resources. Volunteers - not paid professionals — often take the lead in nearly all aspects of trail resources inventorying and database construction, planning, development, interpretation, preservation, and maintenance. In 1968 this was a new way to care for public resources, and 40 years later it still is innovative and routinely leads to creative leveraging many times over of the Federal funding provided for these trails by Congress. In 2006 volunteers organized and guided by the non-profit partner trail organizations contributed more than 687,000 hours to help develop and sustain the national scenic and historic trails and the natural and cultural resources along them. This people-based approach to public land stewardship also involves communities linked by these trails so that the National Trails System has become a "culture of people-based community conservation."

- The National Trails System Act was signed into law October 2, 1968, yet 40 years later only the initial two trails - the Appalachian and Pacific Crest National Scenic Trails - are fully available for the public to experience from end to end. The other National Scenic Trails and all of the National Historic Trails are still in various stages of completion. Many miles of right-of-way need to be acquired for the public to be able to fully enjoy the National Scenic Trails and many sites and remnants remain to be preserved and fully interpreted for the public to fully understand and appreciate the National Historic Trails.

- To fully realize the promise of the National Trails System for public benefit we should dedicate ourselves to a "Decade for the National Trails" leading to the 50th Anniversary of the National Trails System, and the 40th Anniversary of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, in 2018. Over this Decade we should strive to:
 - Raise public awareness of the National Trails System so that it becomes well known to every citizen and community in the United States;
 - Complete and enhance the designated National Scenic and Historic Trails for public appreciation and enjoyment, while conserving landscapes along the corridors;
 - Build the capacity and skills of the Federal agencies to better administer, manage, and sustain National Scenic, Historic, and Recreation Trails;
 - Enhance the capacity and skills of non-profit organizations, such as the Continental Divide Trail Alliance (www.cdtrail.org), to be able to continue to recruit, train, lead, and supervise ever more volunteer stewards of the National Trails forming a Nation-wide network of community based natural and cultural resource stewardship.